

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 000048

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PL](#)

SUBJECT: POLISH PROTEST PARTIES FACE CHALLENGES IN BACKING GOVERNMENT

REF: A. 2005 WARSAW 4020

[1](#)B. 2005 WARSAW 4050

[1](#)1. (SBU) Since coalition talks with Civic Platform (PO) fell apart in late October, the minority Law and Justice (PiS) government has relied on the support of two protest parties in parliament: Andrzej Lepper's populist, agrarian Self Defense (SO) and the extreme right-wing League of Polish Families (LPR), headed by Roman Giertych. SO and LPR insiders challenge the widely-held view that PiS is absorbing their electorates and relegating their charismatic leaders to irrelevance. They believe that Lepper and Giertych have a loyal following that will not desert them, and that the favors they gain in exchange for their support of PiS are aiding SO's and LPR's long-term goals. Current polls, however, indicate a dramatic drop in support for these parties in the first months of the new government, suggesting that -- to a large degree, and at least for now -- PiS is succeeding in its strategy. End Summary.

Self Defense: Moving into the Mainstream?

[1](#)2. (SBU) Lepper has come a long way since his road blockades and manure slingshots of the early 1990s. In the September 2005 elections his party again won third place and over 11 percent of the popular vote. Lepper's individual popularity as a presidential candidate rose from three percent of the vote in 2000 to fifteen percent in 2005. He has so far behaved himself since being reappointed Deputy Speaker of the Sejm, a position from which he was recalled in 2001 after only five weeks, for employing unsubstantiated, slanderous rhetoric to accuse other political leaders of corruption.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Both Lepper and Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz deny publicly that there have been any discussions of a formal coalition, although Lepper confidant and SO European deputy Ryszard Czarnecki told Poloff that SO would be willing to form a coalition with PiS if the conditions were right. (Lepper has since publicly reaffirmed SO's readiness to join the government.) Czarnecki argued that SO faces a "win-win" situation here. If a coalition with PiS is not realized, Czarnecki said, SO would stay in the opposition and support PiS initiatives when they correspond with SO's own program. In the unlikely event that PO and PiS form a coalition, SO would then gladly lead the hard opposition and, Czarnecki thinks, be well positioned for the next elections.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Czarnecki acknowledged observations that PiS is trying to absorb SO support in its effort to build PiS into the leading conservative party (which PiS members readily admit privately - Ref A). Czarnecki said SO leaders will make an effort to oppose PiS more openly in order to draw distinctions between SO's and PiS's priorities. Czarnecki said Lepper will try to steer his party towards the center as he believes PiS's policies will veer toward the right and alienate many. However, Lepper must use a "two-handed approach" in which he shows his long-term support base that he is still committed to protecting Polish small farmers while at the same time developing his "social liberalism" (Ref B). Czarnecki said that he does not fear PiS encroachment because he believes that Lepper is a charismatic leader with a loyal support base. He claimed polls that suggest his party's base is shifting towards PiS (SO's support has dropped to seven percent in the most recent survey) are "inaccurate."

LPR: Keeping Poland "Polish"

[1](#)5. (SBU) Roman Giertych emphasized to Poloff during a recent meeting that he is not discouraged by his party's drop in the polls, and that he intends to be in Polish politics for the long haul. LPR had a lackluster showing last September (winning less than eight percent of the vote, half its percentage in 2004 EU parliamentary elections). Only 34, Giertych was too young to run for president (his father Maciej was LPR's candidate instead) and 10 of LPR's 34 Sejm deputies are under age 30. LPR relied heavily on its youthful "shock troops," the quasi-fascist "All-Poland Youth" (an organization that Giertych revived and led himself from

1989 to 1994), in the 2005 election, but this may have hurt its standing among some older LPR voters, many of whom defected to PiS.

16. (SBU) Giertych told Poloff that LPR will under no circumstances form a coalition with PiS and will only support PiS on aspects of the government's agenda which are in accord with LPR's own program and long-term goals. Giertych told us he is most concerned with the promotion of pro-family legislation (such as GOP payments to women each time they give birth) and the opposition of further EU integration. Giertych also suggested that he would use his newly-won position as chair of the parliamentary special services committee (compensation for LPR support for formation of the PiS government) to prevent the immigration to Poland of "potentially divisive minorities." When asked if he was concerned about PiS's wooing of LPR's traditional electorate, Giertych maintained that he is not worried about the short-term trends (recent polls place support for LPR well below the five-percent threshold for parliamentary representation.) Giertych predicted that his party will be even stronger in a year or two when, he predicts, voters will be disillusioned with PiS's performance and will then turn to LPR. Giertych's split with the conservative Catholic Radio Maryja also hurt his party - to the benefit of PiS, putting into question his optimistic projections.

Foreign Policy Perspectives

17. (SBU) LPR and SO alike maintain to us that they are pro-American (despite sometimes very harsh anti-U.S. rhetoric over Iraq) and range from skeptical to openly hostile towards EU integration. Czarnecki claimed that, while initially radically anti-EU, Self-Defense is now more pro-EU since many of Poland's farmers benefit greatly from the EU agricultural payments. Rather than opposing the EU, Czarnecki said, SO will now focus its efforts on the strong defense of Polish national interests in the context of further EU integration. Giertych recently criticized PM Marcinkiewicz's "euphoric victory" at the EU budget negotiations and opposes the new GOP's engagement with the EU. Neither party includes foreign policy among its top priorities, fortunately, and their influence on the new government so far has been minimal (as seen in the GOP's decision to extend the Polish deployment in Iraq, for example, a move opposed by both SO and LPR).

Comment

18. (SBU) Self-Defense and LPR both enjoy unexpected attention given PiS's shortfall of votes in parliament (the support of at least one, but usually both parties, is needed to reach a majority), but their position has yet to translate into concrete benefits for their parties. Politically, their cooperation with PiS appears to have cost them support with voters, many of whom have shifted their allegiances to the governing party. For now, SO and LPR must manage to strike a balance between demonstrating independence (as when they opposed two GOP initiatives in late December) and provoking PiS to reconsider a coalition with PO or early elections (which, according to current polls, could be disastrous for those weakened parties). Over the longer term, SO and LPR leaders have to hope for either an eventual coalition offer from PiS (which PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski hinted at January 10) or a collapse in public support for the PiS government that could benefit their radical parties.

ASHE